

EARLY FORTIFICATIONS IN BALTIMORE HARBOR.

OH, SAY CAN YOU SEE,  
BY THE DAWN'S EARLY LIGHT.



MEMORIAL TO FRANCIS SCOTT KEY.

*Louis Melchior*

*4/30/25*

## EARLY FORTIFICATIONS IN BALTIMORE HARBOR.

This thesis on the "Early Fortifications of Baltimore Harbor", was written as a part of the initiation into the Phi Mu, Honorary Engineering Fraternity, of the University of Maryland by Louis F. Melchior; and treats of the Location, Reservation, History, etc., of the "Early Fortifications in Baltimore Harbor".



## EARLY FORTIFICATIONS IN BALTIMORE HARBOR.

### LOCATION:

Fort McHenry, Maryland, a former United States military post was established in 1794. It was located on Whetstone Point, Patapsco River, about three miles from Baltimore. It was first occupied in 1775, but was not fortified until 1794.

### RESERVATION:

It appears from old land records that in 1662 Mr. Charles Gorsuch, of the Society of Friends, took up and patented fifty acres of land on Whetstone Point, and it is a part of this tract that the Government now holds. The fort proper stands on ground which belonged at the time of its erection almost wholly to the State of Maryland. On May 17th, 1800 this ground was deeded by the state to one William Goodwin, who on August 26th, of the same year conveyed it to the United States for the sum of \$5,000. The first purchase of any part of the reservation by the United States bears the date of July 20th, 1795, under the authority of an act of Congress of March 20th, 1794, but no part of the forts seems to be on this land. Additional portions of land were purchased by the United States in 1798 and 1800. In 1836 and 1837 still other lands were purchased under the act of July 2nd, 1836.

Under Authority of the act of Congress, Jan. 19th, 1878 conveyance was made of eleven acres to the Baltimore

Dry Dock Company, reducing the area of the reservation to thirty four acres two roods six poles.

Jurisdiction over the tract so acquired, embracing in all forty five acres two roods six poles was ceded by the legislature to Maryland, Feb. 27th, 1816 and March 31st, 1838.

#### LINES OF COMMUNICATION:

The lines of communication, by which the fort is now reached, are the post-office, telegraph, and the railroad station, all at Baltimore, Maryland.

#### HISTORY:

Early in the war of the Revolution the provincial convention of Maryland ordered the construction of defensive works at Baltimore. Fortifications were begun in 1775, and in the spring of 1776 a force of two hundred and fifty negroes were employed in providing timber, logs, etc., for the erection of a boom between Whetstone Point and the Lazaretto and building batteries and mountain guns. Beacons and signal stations were established on the shores of the Patapsco and the Chesapeake for communicating intelligence of the approach of the enemy.

On the 5th of March 1776, the British sloop of war Otter and several tenders appeared in Chesapeake Bay, creating much consternation at Baltimore from fear of bombardment. The Council of Safety of the city at once took steps to hasten the completion of the defenses, and in addition to these a chain was stretched across the nar-



row neck of the harbor supported by twenty-one sunken schooners. This was removed after the withdrawal of the Otter, and upon the return of peace the works were abandoned.

Early in the Administration of President Washington grave complications arose between the American Government and Great Britian. Complaint was made of depredations upon

British commerce by American privateers carrying the French flag; there was irritation



growing out

AN OLD FIFTEEN INCH SMOOTH BORE.

of the vague provisions of the treaty of 1783 in relation to the cessions of lands and military posts in the Northwest; and pending the settlement of these and other differences by diplomacy, in 1796, war seemed eminent. The President recommended serious preparation for offense and defense. The citizens of Baltimore, at their own expense, commenced the erection of a star fort on Whetstone Point, under the direction of John J. Rivardi. Under the authority of the act of Congress of March 20th, 1794, the legislature of Maryland having given its consent, this fort



passed under the control of the General Government and was named Fort McHenry in honor of James McHenry, of Maryland, secretary to General Washington during the Revolutionary War, and Secretary of War from 1796 to 1800. The formal cession to the United States by the legislature of Maryland did not take place however, till 1816. The works were completed in 1805.

In April, 1813, Rear-Admiral Cockburn passed up Chesapeake Bay with a British fleet and anchored off Baltimore. No attack was made, however, but a rigorous blockade was declared. The fleet remained in the vicinity for several months, ravaging the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, when it was withdrawn for service further south. This use of the great naval force at the command of the British was intended in 1813 to divert the American forces from invasion of Canada. The fall of Napoleon having released a large veteran force for service in America, it was determined in 1814 to send a formidable military force to cooperate with the navy in an attack upon Baltimore and Washington. Accordingly, in August the British squadron in the Chesapeake Bay was greatly augmented by the arrival of additional fleets, under Admiral Cochran and Commodore Malcolm, bringing several thousand of Wellington's veterans of the peninsular campaigns under the command of Major-General Ross. In the meantime the work of extending and perfecting the defenses of Baltimore, begun the year before, had been pushed with great vigor. About



a half a million dollars had been expended for the purpose, under the direction of the mayor and committee of safety. The chief fortifications consisted of two long lines of breast works extending from Harris Creek northward across Hampstead Hill ( now the site of Patterson Park), about a mile in length, along which, at short distances, semi-circular batteries were thrown up. Behind these, on more elevated sites, commanding the lower line were several additional

batteries one of which, known as Rodger's Bastion, overlooked Fort McHenry. There was also connecting lines of



A BATTERY OF OLD GUNS.

breast works and rifle pits running parallel with the northern boundary of the city, commanded in turn by inner bastions and batteries, the precise location of which is not known. A four-gun battery was constructed at Lazaretto Point and between this point and Fort McHenry, across the mouth of the harbor, a number of vessels were sunk. Southwest of the fort, guarding the middle branch of the Patapsco against the landing of troops operating to assail Fort McHenry in the rear, were two redoubts, five hundred



yards apart, called "Fort Covington" and the "city battery". In the rear of these, upon high ground, the present site of Battery Square, was the circular battery. A long line of platforms for guns was erected a few yards in front of Fort McHenry. This was called the "water battery".

The news of the capture of Washington on the 24th of August and a contemplation of a probable fate of the city should it fall into the hands of the enemy greatly stimulated the excitement and inspired renewed military preparations at Baltimore. Fort McHenry was at this time defended by about one thousand men, commanded by Major George Armstead, Third Artillery, comprising three companies of United States artillery, six hundred infantry, and three volunteer city companies under the command of Captains Berry and Nicholson and Lieutenant Pennington. Intrenchments about the city were defended by a force of about twelve thousand men, mostly militia hastily gathered together, under the command Major-General Samuel Smith.

On September 11th, 1814, seven vessels anchored off of North Point, where the troops debarked and the war ships, sixteen in number, including bomb vessels, moved up within about two and one half miles of Fort McHenry. On the 12th a sharp engagement took place, known as the battle of North Point, the Americans under General Stricker, retiring upon the main defenses. In this action the British Commander, General Ross, was killed. Early on the morning of the 13th the enemy's fleet, ar-



ranged in a semicircle, opened fire upon Fort McHenry, and the bombardment continued almost without interruption until the morning of the 14th. More than eighteen hundred shells, some of them weighing two hundred and twenty pounds, and a great number of round shot and rockets were fired. A shell and a carcass, both of fourteen inch caliber, now at the post are said to have been thrown by the enemy during the bombardment. Many of the shells burst over the

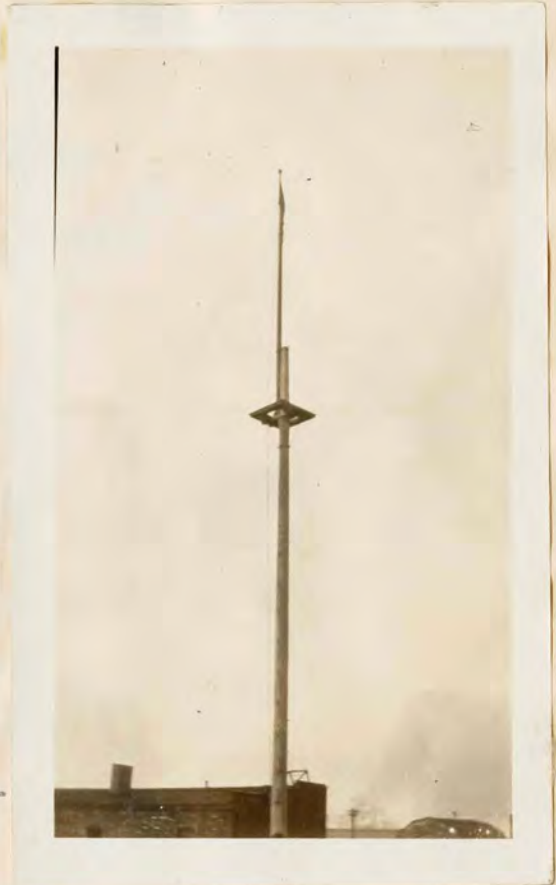
fort and about four hundred fell within the inclosure, but the garrison suffered a loss of



but four killed and twenty-four wounded. During much of the time occupied in the bombardment in the attacking vessels were kept beyond the range of the guns of the fort. About midnight, under the cover of darkness, a few bomb ketches and rocket boats, with eighty barges, manned by about twelve hundred picked men provided with scaling ladders, pushed up the cove beyond Fort McHenry to effect a landing and attempt an escalade from the rear. They passed the fort and moved for the shore with loud cheers, but a fire



was opened upon them simultaneously from Fort McHenry, Fort Covington, the city battery and the circular battery, and they withdrew hastily to the shelter of darkness, after losing many men and suffering much damage. During the thirteenth, while the bombardment by the fleet was in progress, the British army maneuvered continually in front of the entrenchments of the city, but did not hazard an attack. The attempt on Fort McHenry and its outlying defenses having resulted in a failure, further operations for the capture of the city were abandoned. The troops re-embarked at North Point and at nine o'clock on the morning of September the 14th, the fleet under Admiral Cochran



ORIGINAL FLAG POLE FROM WHICH  
THE AMERICAN FLAG WAS FLOWN  
WHEN THE "STAR SPANGLED BANNER"  
WAS WRITTEN.

weighed anchor and stood down the Patapsco. It was during the bombardment of Fort McHenry that Francis Scott Key a prisoner on board the British fleet and a spectator of the night battle composed "The Star Spangled Banner" which at once assumed and has since retained its place in popular esteem as peculiarly the national air. At the close



of hostilities the temporary fortifications were abandoned.

During the Civil War Baltimore was again fortified. On the night of the 13th of May, 1861, the elevation called Federal Hill was occupied by troops under the command of Major-General Butler, and in the following months a strong fort was erected there under the direction of General Brewerton, United States Engineers. The work inclosed the entire crown of the hill and mounted fifty guns. A number of other works were afterwards constructed, among them Fort Marshall east of Patterson Park and Fort Worthington, near Maryland Hospital. These, with other temporary works, were abandoned at the close of the war. In April, 1861, an attempt, was made by Confederate sympathizers to gain possession of Fort McHenry. The garrison of one hundred recruits was commanded by Captain Robinson. Preparations were made to sweep the approaches with grape and annister which deterred the mob from making an attack.

During the World War there was a hospital located on the area near and at Fort McHenry, and at present a small force is maintaining an office of the Veterans Bureau there.

#### SUMMARY OF THE POST AS IT NOW EXISTS:

The buildings now standing at the fort are officer's quarters, S. S. 2, D. S. 4, - noncommissioned staff officer's quarters, 4 - hospital steward's quarters, 1 - artillery barracks, 3 (capacity, sixty men each) -

temporary barracks, 3 (capacity fifty men each) - hospital,  
1 ( capacity fourteen beds) - mechanics quarters, 1 -  
post headquarters, 1 - library and post exchange, 1 -  
post chapel, 1 - temporary mess hall, 1 - ordinance store  
house, 1-  
quartermas-  
ter commis-  
sary store-  
house, 1-  
quartermas-  
ter office  
and store-  
house, 1 -



gun shed and            THE POST CHAPTER BUILT IN 1860.  
storehouse, 1 - quartermaster stable, 1 - (capacity,  
thirteen animals) - commanding officer's stable, 1 -  
post bakery, 1 and magazine "A", 1.

METHOD OF LIGHTING THE POST AND WATER SUPPLY SYSTEM:

The post is now lighted by electricity which is  
purchased from the city of Baltimore and the water is  
supplied by mains from the Baltimore City Waterworks.  
The quality of the water is very good and the quantity is  
sufficient. The pressure is not over twenty pounds per  
square inch. The date of installation and the original  
cost of the water system is unknown; but \$7428.20 was  
expended in improvements and extensions since 1898.



SEWER SYSTEM:

The post is provided with a sewer system, draining into the Patapsco River through eight, ten and twelve inch pipe. The system appears to have been established in 1877, and was improved and extended in 1886 at a cost of \$3545.60.

POST CEMETERY:

The post has a cemetery located near the southeastern shore of the Patapsco River and contains about one third of an acre.

ARMAMENT OF FORT:

The armament of the fort consists of five fifteen inch and seven eight inch smooth bores and three eight inch converted rifles.

PRESENT CONDITION OF FORT:

At present the fort area is not kept up and is in a bad condition.

The books used for reference in preparation of this thesis were obtained at the War College, Washington, D. C. The following books were consulted; A History of Maryland, Stark - Encyclopedia Americana - A History of Ports and Military Reservations of the United States.